

Professional Boundaries

What are workplace boundaries? Boundaries vary in the workplace, they can be: physical, intellectual, emotional, sexual, material, and time. But what are boundaries?

Boundaries are the limits you set for yourself that define what you are willing to accept, do, or tolerate. They create an effective way to protect yourself and not to control another. Healthy boundaries are set to help you make sure mentally and emotionally you are stable. Whereas a complete lack of boundaries may indicate you do not have a strong sense of your own identity. Boundaries can also be labeled as being rigid (those that keep everyone away) and porous (those that tend to be too involved with others).

The Need for Boundaries

Setting professional boundaries in the workplace will help you:

- Create a healthy relationship with your employees and your employees with each other
- Will help your employees perform well and create a strong connection by creating a structure for employees to follow
- Will allow you to interact more with your employees and peers
- Stay focused on the goal
- Create healthy communication
- Avoid burnout
- Develop your identity, through good mental/emotional health

Setting boundaries at work can be difficult at first. It takes a thorough evaluation of your current boundaries. You can assess these by asking the following questions:

- Are your boundaries rigid or porous?
- Have you communicated your boundaries with your employees and peers to include defining your boundaries?
- Are you regularly enforcing your boundaries, do you feel respected? How are you enforcing your boundaries and how are your employees responding?
- Are you constantly being tested and how have you prepared yourself to be tested?

Lack of Professional Boundaries

Not having any professional boundaries at work can actually be harmful to your work. They can begin to:

- Take the focus of the mission of FDL and your work
- Lack clarity and direction for your employees
- Create confusion and/or resentment among employees
- Fragment your employees
- Create pessimism and powerlessness, as well as a lack of trust with your employees
- Create lack of respect, accountability, and high producing employees

Here Are Some Ways to Create Healthy Boundaries

Set priorities. Determine what your priorities are. Do they match the priorities of FDL? Do they match your Division/Department's priorities? This will help you decide what boundaries to set and what you are willing to compromise on.

Delegate tasks. Delegate when appropriate. Especially important if you do not have time for a task. It will help you stay more focused on the more important issues at hand. It will create some time and the ability to keep a manageable workload.



Understand your workload. Knowing what your daily duties are, as well as, what you can handle, will allow you to better set your boundaries. Will help you be more productive and prevent stress.

Take time off. Just do it! It is extremely important to develop and maintain a personal life beyond work. It allows one to “regroup” and come back to the workplace refreshed and ready to take on the daily challenges of the workplace.

Communicate often. Clear communication is necessary to express your thoughts to others and set boundaries. This helps solve issues that may cause the need to have boundaries.

Ask for advice. Ask for help. You never know who may have experienced the same issue.

Set limits. Set limits for yourself. Limit your workload and time at work. **KEY TAKE AWAY:** Don't take work home.

Establish a clear schedule. Whether you are talking the days and hours you work weekly or when you can answer calls and emails. This allows you to stay focused on your tasks.

Recognize your emotions. It is important to recognize your emotions and what is causing them at work. At times you may need to work through them, *which is a good time to contact your EAP.*

Be honest. Talk to others about your boundaries and reasonings behind them. Keep your professional life professional and personal life out of your profession.

Build professional relationships. Be professional when at work. Even if you are friends with some of your colleagues at work. This will help with not creating a fracturing team.

Respect others. Respect other's professional boundaries. Creating a healthy and productive workplace environment.

Establish boundaries at home. Even off the work site, establishing boundaries at home helps with stress and burnout. Leave all work-related materials at work, do not check emails, or take phone calls. If you **DO** have to work, dedicate a work site in your home and limit the number of hours you spend there.

Identify your job responsibilities. What are your job responsibilities? Ensure that you have a clear understanding of your responsibilities. Ensure you are not taking other duties you are not responsible for. Talk to your supervisor if you are uncertain what they are.

Practice saying no. Gently saying “no” is both healthy and acceptable. This allows you to maintain your boundaries, as well as alleviate stress and burnout.

***Disclaimer:** The above article is for educational purposes only. For more information contact FDL EAP at (218) 878-7514 (w) or (218) 390-4993 (c), Monday – Friday, 8am – 430pm, unless previously set up. EAP is a benefit for all FDL employees and their immediate family members.

